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DE RUEHIT #0155 1241414
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P 041414Z MAY 09
FM AMCONSUL ISTANBUL
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 8929
INFO RUEHAK/AMEMBASSY ANKARA 8223
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHDC
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASH DC
RUEKJCS/DIA WASHDC
RHMFISS/JOINT STAFF WASHINGTON DC
RUFOADA/JAC MOLESWORTH RAF MOLESWORTH UK
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC
RUEUITH/ODC ANKARA TU
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC
RHEHAAA/WHITE HOUSE WASHDC

UNCLAS ISTANBUL 000155

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: AUTHORIZED MAY DAY DEMOSTRATORS MARCH ON TAKSIM

REF: 08 ISTANBUL 208

1 (U) May Day related violence diminished for a second year in Istanbul. According to Istanbul Governor Muammer Guler, 108 protestors were detained May Day 2009, compared over 500 arrests the previous year (reftel). Two labor unions) Confederation of Turkish Labor Unions (Turk-Is) and Hak-Is received last minute permission to march on the Ataturk Monument in Taksim Square. This was the first authorized march on Taksim Square by union supporters since May Day 1977, when 36 people were killed. Following the two labor unions, rally, about 5,000 other union supporters were also able to march on Taksim Square without much incident. This group included members of parliament from both the opposition Republican People,s Party (CHP) and the pro-Kurdish Democratic Society Party (DTP), including its leader Ahmet Turk. Violence did break out on some of the side streets leading to Taksim Square with reports of protesters throwing rocks at the police and shop windows. Also there was a single report of a Molotov cocktail used in an area near Taksim. The police used water cannons and pepper gas to control the crowd. Similar to 2008 and 2007, the city halted public transportation in areas surrounding Taksim Square in an effect to limit access to the area. Legal demonstrations also occurred in Kadikoy, an opposition held district in Istanbul on the Asia side of the city, Cagalayan, and Kazilcesme.

12. (SBU) Comment: Violence was likely curbed this year by the government,s recognition of May Day as a national holiday along with approval for a &reasonable8 number of union supporters to reach the monument at Taksim Square. Last year, these demands from labor union leaders were rejected by the Istanbul Governor (a Ministry of Interior appointee.) This year, the governor reversed his position. The ruling AKP government also appeared to favor unions that wanted a day off at the expense of business groups who suffered productively losses because of the holiday. However, even if May Day had remained a workday, productivity would have likely dropped significantly in Istanbul due to strong security measures necessary to control the crowds.

Wiener